

Buddhist trainees who have attained renunciation, on the other hand, cultivate the different meditative absorptions in order to take rebirth in one of the eight levels not out of attachment but if it is conducive for their practice and - particularly in the case of Arya Bodhisattvas - if it enables them to benefit sentient beings.

Furthermore, practitioners who are on the Hinayana or Mahayana path develop the meditative absorptions to serve as mental bases for supramundane uninterrupted paths, paths of release, and so forth, since the absorptions are more stable and have greater focus. Awarenesses that pertain to the Desire Realm are too coarse and scattered to serve as mental bases particularly for meditative equipoise paths that directly realize emptiness.

Regarding Hinayana paths, the first concentration serves as the mental basis of meditative equipoise paths in the continua of Hinayana Aryas who have attained only the first concentration. This means that supramundane uninterrupted paths and paths of release in the continua of such Aryas *are* first concentrations. Likewise, the second concentration serves as the mental basis of meditative equipoise paths in the continua of Hinayana Aryas who have attained only the first and second concentrations. The third concentration serves as the mental basis of meditative equipoise paths in the continua of Hinayana Aryas who have attained the first, second, and third concentrations, and so forth. In the case of Hinayana Aryas who have attained all eight meditative absorptions, it is necessarily the nothingness absorption that serves as the mental base of supramundane uninterrupted paths and paths of release. The reason for this is that the peak of cyclic existence absorption is so subtle that it lacks the necessary clarity to enable Hinayana Aryas to utilize it as the mental basis of the meditative equipoise paths that directly realize emptiness. Therefore, in the continua of Hinayana Aryas there are no meditative equipoise paths that *are* peak of cyclic existence absorptions.

As explained below, there are also Hinayana Aryas who have not attained any of the eight meditative absorptions. Yet all Hinayana Aryas have attained the union of calm abiding and special insight, and such a union in the continuum of someone who has not attained any of the meditative absorptions is necessarily a *preparatory stage* of the First Concentration Level. Therefore, in the case of Hinayana Aryas who have not attained any of the eight meditative absorptions, the preparatory stage of the First Concentration Level (i.e. the union of calm abiding and special insight that pertains to the preparatory state of the first concentration) serves as the mental basis of supramundane uninterrupted paths, paths of release, and so forth.

Regarding Mahayana paths, as mentioned earlier, Arya Bodhisattvas have necessarily attained the fourth concentration, while they have not necessarily cultivated any of the formless absorptions. Yet even if Arya Bodhisattvas (who entered the Mahayana path from the outset without having entered the Hinayana path first) have attained any of the formless absorptions, the mental basis of the supramundane uninterrupted path and the path of release of their Mahayana *path of seeing* must be a fourth concentration. The reason for this is that the uninterrupted path and path of release of the Mahayana path of seeing are the first meditative equipoise paths these Bodhisattvas generate, so they lack the ability to directly realize emptiness with any of the formless absorptions (which are less clear than the concentrations). The fourth concentration, on the other hand, is the most serviceable mental basis particularly for the initial direct realization of emptiness because as Lama Tsongkhapa says in his ***Stairway to a Clear Awareness***, the mental factors of calm abiding (meditative stability) and special insight (meditative analysis) of the fourth concentration are perfectly proportioned and operate with equal strength. However, with their growing familiarity with direct realization of emptiness, Bodhisattvas on the Mahayana path of meditation can utilize whichever meditative absorption is the highest they have cultivated - even the peak of cyclic existence absorption - as the mental basis of their meditative equipoise paths.

Reason for non-Buddhists to cultivate any of the eight meditative absorptions	Reason for Hinayana practitioners to cultivate any of the eight meditative absorptions	Reason for Mahayana practitioners to cultivate any of the eight meditative absorptions
To be reborn in one of the eight levels of the Form and Formless Realms, which they assert to be states of liberation.	To serve as mental bases of their paths, and in order to take rebirth in any of the levels of the Form and Formless Realms if it is conducive for their practice	To serve as mental bases of their paths, and in order to take rebirth in any of the levels of the Form Realms in order to benefit sentient beings

The objects of meditation

It is important to understand that in the case of cultivating meditative absorptions in dependence on mundane paths, the attainment of any of the eight meditative absorptions depends on the respective preparatory stage since the mundane uninterrupted paths of the preparatory stages temporarily eliminate the mundane innate afflictions that prevent the different absorptions from manifesting. Thus, the question that arises is, 'what is the object of meditation of these preparatory stages?' The object of meditation on which mundane preparatory stages focus is called "bearer of the aspects of peace and coarseness" (*zhi rags kyi rnam pa can*). Non-Buddhists and Buddhists who lack renunciation and aspire to be born, for instance, in the First Concentration Level cultivate and meditate (during the preparatory stage that pertains to the First Concentration Level) on an awareness that bears the aspect of coarseness with regard to the Desire Realm and the aspect of peace with regard to the First Concentration Level. In other words, they cultivate a meditative awareness which regards the Desire Realm to be coarse and faulty and the First Concentration Level to be peaceful and faultless. The intense focus on these aspects of peace and coarseness then enables the preparatory stage that pertains to the First Concentration Level to temporarily eliminate the nine types of mundane innate afflictions of the Desire Realm (in particular mundane innate attachment to the Desire Realm) and attain the first concentration.

Similarly, non-Buddhists and Buddhists lacking renunciation who have attained the first concentration and now aspire to be born in the Second Concentration Level, cultivate and meditate (during the preparatory stage that pertains to the Second Concentration Level) on an awareness that possesses the aspect of coarseness with regard to the First Concentration Level and the aspect of peace with regard to the Second Concentration Level. Hence, their meditative awareness regards the First Concentration Level to be coarse and faulty and the Second Concentration Level to be peaceful and faultless. By intensely focusing on these two aspects of peace and coarseness, the preparatory stage that pertains to the Second Concentration Level develops the ability to temporarily eliminate the nine types of mundane innate afflictions of the First Concentration Level and thereby to attain the second concentration.

The same applies to the cultivation of the third and fourth concentrations.

In the case of the four formless absorptions, non-Buddhists and Buddhists who lack renunciation and aspire to be born in the First Formless Level, the Limitless Space Level, cultivate and meditate (during the preparatory stage that pertains to the First Formless Level) on an awareness that bears the aspect of coarseness with regard to the focal object of the fourth concentration and the aspect of peace with regard to the focal object of the limitless space absorption. This means that they cultivate a meditative awareness which regards the focal object of the fourth concentration to be coarse and faulty and the focal object of the limitless space absorption (i.e. limitless space) to be peaceful and faultless. The intense focus on these aspects of peace and coarseness then enables the preparatory stage that pertains to the First Formless Level to temporarily eliminate the nine types of mundane innate afflictions of the Fourth Concentration Level and attain the first formless absorption.

Non-Buddhists and Buddhists who lack renunciation and aspire to be born in the Second Formless Level, the Limitless Consciousness Level, cultivate and meditate (during the preparatory stage of the Second Formless Level) on an awareness that bears the aspect of coarseness with regard to the focal object of the first formless absorption and the aspect of peace with regard to the focal object of the second formless absorption. Thus, they cultivate a meditative awareness which regards the focal object of the first formless absorption (i.e. limitless space) to be coarse and faulty and the focal object of the second formless absorption (i.e. limitless consciousness) to be peaceful and faultless.